

Department of Transitional Assistance, DTA

Language Access Plan

September 9, 2016

I. Introduction

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) has prepared this Language Access Plan (“LAP” or “Plan”), which defines the actions that have been or will be taken by DTA to ensure meaningful access to agency services, programs and activities on the part of persons who have limited English proficiency. DTA will review and update, on a biannual basis, this LAP in order to ensure continued responsiveness to community needs and compliance with the Executive Office for Administration and Finance (“ANF”) Administrative Bulletin #16, as updated on March 20, 2015.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to ensure clients of DTA meaningful access to services, programs and activities although they may be limited in their English language proficiency.

DTA is committed to this Language Access Plan as the appropriate response to meeting our clients’ needs. The Plan is consistent with the requirements of Administrative Bulletin #16 as promulgated by the Executive Office for Administration and Finance and updated on March 20, 2016..

Consistent with the guidance of ANF Administrative Bulletin #16, a Limited English Proficient (“LEP”) person is someone who is not able to speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that allows him/her to interact effectively with DTA staff. A client maintains the right to self-identify as a LEP person.

III. Agency Description

DTA’s mission is to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life. DTA administers three main assistance programs: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) and Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC). In addition to providing food and cash assistance, DTA provides employment services to TAFDC and SNAP recipients and a teen parenting program with the Department of Children and Families.

As of September 2016, approximately 773,270 individuals, or one in every nine residents of Massachusetts, receive some sort of public assistance from DTA. The Department currently has 22 local offices throughout the state and employs approximately 1,558 employees.

IV. Language Access Plan:

The DTA Language Access Plan shall be fully implemented subject to the availability of fiscal resources to implement said language access plan. This Language Access Plan has been developed to adhere to the Language Access Guidelines of ANF Administrative Bulletin #16. This Language Access Plan represents DTA's administrative blueprint to provide meaningful access to its services, programs and activities on the part of LEP individuals. This Language Access Plan outlines the tasks DTA will undertake to meet this objective.

The Language Access Plan is posted on DTA's internet page under "Key Resources." The link to this page is [Executive Office of Health & Human Services Key Resources](#).

(1) DTA Language Access Coordinator:

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600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111
617-348-8528
sarah.stuart@state.ma.us

(2) DTA Language Access Needs Assessment:

- a. Spanish-speaking LEP recipients make up approximately 13.4% of the Department's recipient population. To serve them and Spanish-speaking applicants, the Department employs many Spanish bilingual workers and has specifically recruited persons with Spanish and other language skills. Moreover, the Department currently translates all of its vital documents, including adverse action notices, into Spanish. Most informational posters posted at the local offices are also posted in a Spanish language version.

No other non-English language makes up more than 1% of our client population.

An analysis of 2009-2013 American Community Survey data shows that the DTA caseload mirrors closely languages spoken in the catchment areas for each of its 22 local offices.

Given the critical nature of its services, however, DTA provides in-person or telephone interpretation services to all those who need it, whatever language they speak, to ensure that clients get the benefits for which they are eligible.

In addition, a multilingual or “Babel” card is included in all of its notices which states: “**Important!** The letter in this envelope has information about your benefits. Please read it or have someone translate it for you right away. If you do not understand the information in the letter or need help translating it, please contact your Transitional Assistance Office right away.” This card includes this statement in 20 languages.

Language Makeup of DTA Client Population as of August 2016..

Language	Clients	As %
English	615,759	79.6%
Spanish	103,787	13.4%
Other	7,950	1.0%
Chinese	8,115	1.0%
Portuguese	6,647	0.9%
Haitian Creole	5,867	0.8%
Vietnamese	6,152	0.8%
Arabic	4,927	0.6%
Russian	5,575	0.7%
Cambodian	3,116	0.4%
Somali	1,388	0.2%
French	878	0.1%
Chinese - Mandarin	459	0.1%
Chinese - Cantonese	602	0.1%
Amharic	294	0.0%
Armenian	291	0.0%
Polish	286	0.0%
American Sign Language User	265	0.0%
Greek	269	0.0%
Laotian	208	0.0%
Italian	217	0.0%
Croatian	99	0.0%
Tagalog	75	0.0%
Serbian Cyrillic	38	0.0%
Slovenian	6	0.0%

b. Points of Contact between Agency and Client Population

Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111
617-348-8400

DTA Local Office listing can be found at:
<http://webapps.ehs.state.ma.us/DTAOffices/default.aspx>

DTA website: [Department of Transitional Assistance](#)

SNAP application website: [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)

My Account Page accessed through EOHHS Virtual Gateway

DTA Assistance Line: 1-877-382-2363

SSP Customer Service 1-877-863-1128

Employment Services Providers

Young Parents Program Providers

University of Massachusetts Medical School/Disability Evaluation Services

(3) Language Resources Assessment:

Over the years, the Department has made significant efforts to bolster the number of caseworkers and other staff who are able to deliver services directly to LEP clients or to work as interpreters. There are approximately 255 field staff with bi or multi-lingual abilities. Some case managers are eligible for an increased salary related to their translation duties.

The Department also employs 27 Human Service Assistants who work as interpreters within the local offices, nearly the double employed when DTA submitted its 2011 Language Access Plan. The languages these employees speak are Spanish (19), Cape Verdean Creole and Portuguese (1), Russian (2), Chinese (1), Vietnamese (2) and Khmer (1).

DTA contracts with two vendors who can provide interpretation when there is no in-house staff available. Workers also can access a contracted teleinterpreter service for interpretation when no in-office interpreters are available.

Moreover, in procuring vendors who provide client services for the Department (e.g., employment services providers), the ability to work with LEP clients is an important factor in making contracting decisions.

The Department has available an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system available for clients through the DTA Assistance Line. The IVR options allow clients to find out information about their case and make certain changes or requests, such as proof of benefits, without having to wait to speak with DTA staff. This option is available in Spanish, Portuguese, Cantonese and Vietnamese. If a client has selected one of these languages and wishes to speak with Department staff, they are connected to a case manager with that language ability, as they are available.

Additionally, in August 2016 the Department launched a mobile app called DTA Connect to further enable clients to easily access information about DTA, forms or find out information about their cases. DTA Connect is also available in Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese and Vietnamese.

(3) Language Service Protocols:

a. Language Services DTA uses to Implement its Language Access Plan

In ensuring that the Department meets the needs of its LEP population, the Department currently provides both in-person and telephone interpretation, via its bilingual case managers, Human Service Assistants and its contractors.

b. DTA Interpretation Services Protocols

The Department specifically describes its protocols for providing services whose primary language is not English (or who use the American Sign Language) in its training materials including its Online Guide. The following interpreter services guidelines have been issued to staff:

- The Department is committed to ensuring that interpreters have been trained in interpreter services, ethics and confidentiality. Professional interpreters will be offered free of charge to all LEP/ASL clients to conduct Department business.
- A client who presents either in person or by telephone with an adult intending

to act as an interpreter must be advised that a professional interpreter can be provided free of charge. The client may decline the use of professional interpreter services and choose to have the adult serve as an interpreter.

- Children over age 12 may interpret only to schedule appointments.²

² **Footnote:** Although the Department determined that a child should never be asked to interpret regarding substantive aspects of a household's public assistance case, it was deemed appropriate, with parental consent, for an accompanying teenager to relay the time of a scheduled DTA appointment to his or her parent.

- Children age 12 and under may not be asked to interpret for any purpose.
- A client who speaks some English or appears to understand English may not have the language skills needed to fully comprehend Department terminology or rights, responsibilities and penalties. If the case manager or other Department staff believes that a professional interpreter is necessary, at any point in the interaction, a bilingual case Manager or Human Service Assistant (HSA), if available, or Telelanguage interpreter should be accessed to effectively communicate with a client.
- A client has the right to refuse the use of a particular bilingual case manager, HSA or statewide contracted interpreter if uncomfortable with the interpreter for a personal or cultural reason. Department staff must not inquire as to the reason for refusal. In this situation, a Telelanguage interpreter must be accessed to conduct the interview.
- If a contracted interpreter does not appear for a scheduled in-person interview, the case manager must immediately access a Telelanguage interpreter to conduct the interview. The case manager must not reschedule the interview in this situation.
- Clients must be allowed to complete Department business on the date of first contact, *if time permits*. Otherwise, a follow-up appointment must be scheduled using the interpreter to arrange a mutually convenient date and time. All timing related rights of the client must be preserved as of the first date of contact, based on program rules.
- The Narrative must be updated to reflect the method of translation or the refusal of translation services at each client interaction.

Client Access to DTA Language/Interpretation Services

DTA informs its clients of the availability of free language services in two primary ways. All of its local offices display a “Do You Need an Interpreter” poster which states, “Point to your language. An interpreter will be provided at no cost” in 16 different languages. This document is also found in the LEP Service Binder which is at every local office’s reception desk. As noted above, the “Multilingual/Babel” card, which is inserted in every Department mailing, also informs the recipient that the Department can help with translation of the mailing/notice in 20 languages.

(4) Vital Document Translation

The Department has translated all of its client documents and notices into Spanish. In addition, the Department has translated many other documents into lower-incidence languages. What follows is a description of the translations done to date:

- a. Paper SNAP applications (please note that TAFDC and EAEDC applications are done as part of an interactive BEACON system interview with a case manager). [Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Haitian Creole, Russian, Arabic, French, Italian, Korean and Polish.]
- b. Online SNAP application [Spanish and Portuguese]
- c. Notices of a DTA action affecting a client’s case. [Spanish]
- d. Rights and Responsibilities and SNAP Penalty Warning [Spanish]

- e. Your Right to Know brochure [Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Haitian Creole, and Russian]
- f. *Your Right to an Interpreter* and *What Noncitizens Need to Know* brochures [Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Haitian Creole, and Russian]
- g. *Do you need an Interpreter?* poster (also version in LEP Binder) [Albanian, American Sign Language, Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, Farsi, Haitian Creole, Khmer, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Vietnamese]
- h. Multilingual Card [American Sign Language indicator, Arabic, Armenian, Amharic, Chinese, French, Greek, Haitian Creole, Italian, Khmer, Laotian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian Cyrillic, Serbo-Croatian Latin, Slovenian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese]
- i. In addition to the above documents, the Department has translated its *Community Information Brochure* [Spanish, Haitian Creole, Russian, Khmer, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese], its *You Deserve to Be Safe* (Domestic Violence) Brochure [Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole and Arabic] and its Do You Need Help Because of a Disability (Americans with Disabilities Act) flyer [Spanish, Portuguese Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Haitian Creole, Russian, Laotian]

Consistent with past practice, the Department will use available funding to update already translated documents that need revisions and to expand translation of application- related materials to lower-incidence languages.

(5) Stakeholder Consultations:

Over the last two decades, DTA has worked with the Office for Civil Rights of the federal Department of Health & Human Services as well as community/legal services organizations regarding improving services to LEP clients and applicants. The Department has also recently held focus groups regarding its LEP policies. While the agency did not consult with stakeholders in the development of this Language Access Plan, it has certainly consulted with them over the years regarding its existing, comprehensive LEP policies and will continue to do so.

(6) Staff Training:

All new DTA local office staff are trained regarding existing DTA LEP policy. The Department's dedicated training unit has developed job aids on how to utilize teleinterpreter services.

The Department also periodically reissues (and has available on-line) its specific LEP interpretation protocols.

(7) Notice to Public.

The Department notifies its clients of free language assistance by requiring that all of its local office waiting rooms have a poster that states that interpreters will be provided to clients/applicants at no cost. This poster includes this information in sixteen different languages. Moreover, all local office reception desks are mandated to provide a smaller version of this poster in which the client can point to the specific language he or she needs for interpretation.

(8) Agency Monitoring:

The Department reviews on an ongoing basis whether the needs of its LEP populations are being met. DTA chiefly monitors its accessibility to the LEP population by collecting data regarding the composition of its caseload to 1) guide hiring decisions in reference to bilingual staffing needs and 2) determine into which languages its documents need to be translated. [The Food and Nutrition Service of the United States Department of Agriculture requires translation of certain SNAP documents based upon a formula found at 7 CFR 272.4]. DTA also periodically works with legal advocates and the Office for Refugees and Immigrants to determine what steps need to be taken to further improve its service to LEP individuals.

The Language Access Coordinator uses the above information as well as any received from other sources (e.g., complaints received through the Language Access Complaint procedure described below, local office DTA Advisory Boards) to determine whether its LEP populations are continuing to receive meaningful access to the Department's programs and services.

The Department is exploring using its Local Office Quality Control (LOQC) unit to review compliance with language access policies, either as part of its routine case review function or as a separate review focusing primarily on language access. The LOQC unit is comprised of specialized staff charged with reviewing and analyzing cases to determine the accuracy of work performed by case managers.

(9) Complaints:

Language Access Complaint Procedure

You may file a complaint with the DTA Language Access Coordinator or the Office of Access and Opportunity if you believe you have been denied the benefits of this Plan. You must file your complaint within 6 months of the alleged denial. You must file a written complaint. To file a complaint with the Language Access Coordinator, submit the written complaint to:

Sarah Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Program and Policy Implementation
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111
sarah.stuart@state.ma.us

To file a complaint with the Office of Access and Opportunity, please submit the written complaint to the attention of:

Office of Access and Opportunity
Office of the Governor
State House, Room 373
Boston, MA 02133
Email Address: Jabes.Rojas@state.ma.us

Jeff McCue, Commissioner
Department of Transitional Assistance
Date:

Marylou Sudders, Secretary
Executive Office of Health & Human Services
Date: